image

THE FORGED™

RUCKA · TRAUTMANN · HENDERSON · WOODARD · MAHER

ISSUE 001

THE FORGED™

CREATED BY

GREG RUCKA, ERIC TRAUTMANN & MIKE HENDERSON

STORY ART

COLORS BY **NOLAN WOODARD**
LETTERS BY **ARIANA MAHER**
DESIGN BY **ERIC TRAUTMANN**
EDITED BY **ALEJANDRO ARBONA**
LOGO DESIGN CONSULTANT **SASHA HEAD**

Happy Birthday to ALISON POPPY.

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22ND DAY / NINEMONTH /
REIGN OF THE EMPRESS ETERNAL /
YEAR 13,817 IMPERIAL CALENDAR

--ULED TRANSMISSION TO ICR HALO-41. ENCRYPTION LEVEL EMPRESS 4-1.

WE WILL REACH OUR ULTIMATE MISSION WAYPOINT BY 14:31 NEXTDAY.

THIS IS ISR-22561. MISSION CLOCK IS RUNNING AND ON SCHEDULE.

17 DAYS OUT OF RESUPPLY DEPOT
RAMPART 91 / VANTA LOSIRIS IV DOCKYARDS /
EN ROUTE TO OPERATIONAL THEATER 51-D-11
(HINTERSYSTEMS)

FINAL T-SPACE INSERTION AND TRANSIT IN THREE...

...TWO...

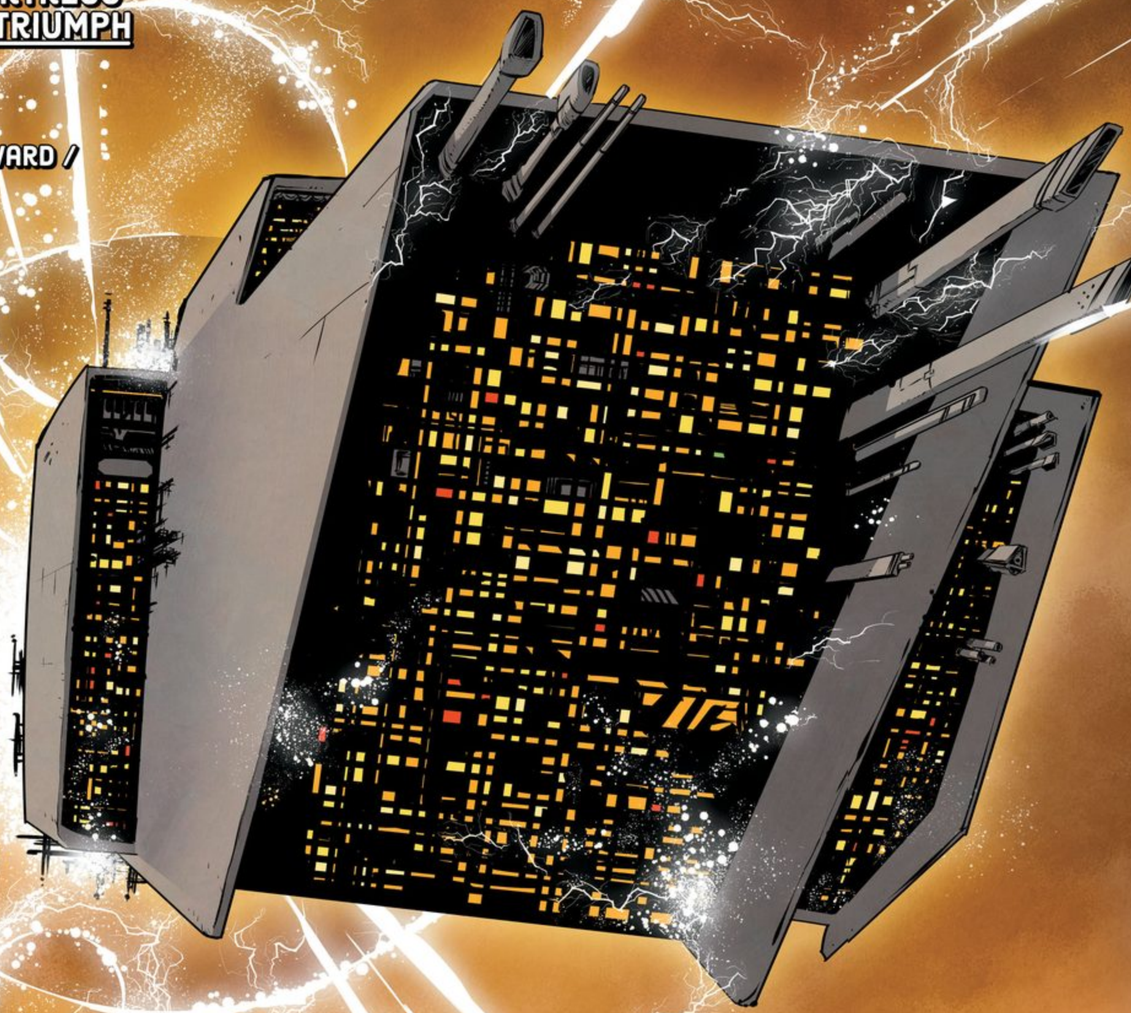
...ONE...

LONG LIVE THE EMPRESS.

HER MAJESTY'S STARFORTRESS
HER ENDLESS RADIANT TRIUMPH
(ISR-22561)

TRANSITION SPACE /
34.5 DEGREES COUNTER-SPINWARD /
VECTOR 716.4

DESTINATION:
THE ACHERON REACH



SQUAD BAY FOR FORGED TEAM SCIMITAR-3

PLEASE TELL ME I GET TO MURDER SOMETHING SOON.

STILL WAITING ON THE BRIEFING PACKET, JO.

YOU *KNOW* SHE'S BLUFFING, PUSHER.

'COURSE SHE IS. SHE ALWAYS DOES.

POT'S LIGHT, JO. ANTE UP ALREADY.

FUCK OFF, PUSH.

I'M *THINKING.*

GIVE HER A BREAK, PUSH. SHE'S BEEN SAVING UP FOR SHORE LEAVE. THOSE LEISUREZONE BOY TOYS DON'T COME CHEAP.

WORTH EVERY PENNY.

YOU WOULDN'T BE SATISFIED IF THE QUARTERMASTER ISSUED YOU A PERSONAL-USE SIX-DICKED GORILLA.

THE HEART WANTS WHAT THE HEART WANTS.

THIRTY. BET'S TO YOU, *HARPO.*

SPOTTER RELAY—

--ALL IN

ALL IN!

BEST DAMN SHARPSHOOTER IN THE EMPIRE.

WORST DAMN CARD PLAYER.

BA-DEET

MISSION SPECS ARE HERE. FOCUS UP.

OOOH! IS IT AN *INSURRECTION* TO BUST? OR A *BUGSTOMP?*

LOVE A GOOD BUGSTOMP.

RECOVERY OP. SEEMS OUR ETERNAL EMPRESS LOST A SHIP, THE *EVER SEEKING FORWARD.*

WENT DOWN HERE, PLANET DESIGNATED *GEHENNA* D-54-C.

SURVEYED '731, MINING CONCESSION ACQUIRED BY AL-ASHANTI IN '49, ABORTED DUE TO TERRAFORMING FAILURE IN '61. ABANDONED EVER SINCE.

METHANE ATMOSPHERE WITH TEMPS IN THE "HELL'S ASSHOLE" RANGE. SILICATES IN THE ATMOSPHERE MEAN IT RAINS MOLTEN GLASS.

WE DROP TO LZ, SWEEP UNTIL WE FIND THE WRECKAGE, PULL THE MISSION LOGS, AND EXFIL BACK TO *TRIUMPH* FOR RETURN TO RAMPART-91.

RELAY: A RECOVERY? US?

HARPO'S RIGHT. THIS IS... WEIRD.

KINDA OVERKILL SENDING US AFTER A BLACK BOX, ISN'T IT, BOSS?

WE GO WHERE THEY TELL US.

WE DO WHAT THEY TELL US TO DO.

WE DON'T ASK ***WHY.***

GET YOUR GEAR PREPPED. STANDARD LOADOUT. BE ON THE MUSTERING DECK IN 30.

I'LL HAVE THE TECHS STAGE THE SUITS FOR EXTREME ENVIRONMENT.

RELAY: BAD FEELING?

...

...SHIT. I BET I DON'T EVEN GET TO SHOOT ***ANYTHING*** THIS TRIP.

DID SHE SAY *WHY?*

NO, CAPTAIN.

THIRTY-SEVEN THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS, NOT A *WORD*, REFUSES *ALL* INVITATIONS TO MY TABLE, MIGHT AS WELL NOT EVEN *BE* ABOARD...

...SUDDENLY SIX HOURS FROM *REALSPACE* RE-ENTRY SHE *SUMMONS* ME?

SHE SUMMONS *ME?* ON *MY* SHIP.

TECHNICALLY, THE *EMPRESS'S* SHIP, BUT--

I KNOW WHOSE SHIP IT IS!

I'M THE GODS-DAMNED *CAPTAIN,* KAILA!

SHE'S THE *CASSANDRA.*

DAMNED IRREGULAR, A CASSANDRA OUT THIS FAR FROM THE CAPITAL SYSTEMS.

MAKES YOU *WONDER,* DOESN'T IT?

I FIND IT'S EASIEST WHEN I *DON'T,* CAPTAIN.

YOU'VE A BRIGHT CAREER AHEAD OF YOU, COMMANDER.

THANK YOU, SIR.

SHALL I WAIT FOR YOU, SIR?

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY.

THANK YOU, COMMANDER WALLSTONE.

RETURN TO THE BRIDGE. RE-ENTRY DECEL TO COMMENCE FIVE LIGHT YEARS OUT.

YES, SIR.

CAPTAIN ESTEBAN HIROTO REYFORT.

ENTER MY PRESENCE.

WOULD YOU PREFER TO KNEEL, CAPTAIN?

IT IS NOT UNHEARD OF TO KNEEL IN OUR PRESENCE.

I KNEEL BEFORE THE ETERNAL EMPRESS, NONE OTHER.

AND ARE WE NOT A PART OF HER GLORY?

WHAT IS A CASSANDRA BUT THE *THOUGHTS* OF SHE WHO RULES FOREVER MADE *MANIFEST?*

I'LL STAND, THANK YOU, LADY.

MHM...

...I WON'T. APPROACH.

THERE. GOOD. STOP.

HMH. HEH. OH, CAPTAIN...

...HOW YOUR **MIND** DOES **RACE**...

...NO, DON'T BE **EMBARRASSED**...

...I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SEEING.

THAT IS THE **PROBLEM** WITH **THOUGHT**, ISN'T IT?

THE **ACT** OF TRYING **NOT** TO THINK ABOUT SOMETHING MAKES IT THE **VERY** THING YOU CANNOT **STOP** THINKING **ABOUT**.

LET ME **HELP**.

...GODS...
...OH DAMN YOU, WITCH...

...WH... WHAT DID YOU DO?

RELIEVED SOME **TENSION.** RELEASED SOME ENDORPHINS. FLOODED SOME DOPAMINE RECEPTORS. MADE YOU FEEL **GOOD.**

YOU WERE SO TWISTED UP, CAPTAIN, I WAS AFRAID YOU WOULDN'T **HEAR** WHAT I HAD TO **SAY** TO YOU.

AND I **NEED** YOU TO **LISTEN.**

N-NO. NO, I'M... I'M LISTENING, MY LADY.

T-SPACE DECEL IS ABOUT TO COMMENCE. ONCE IN REALSPACE, STANDARD PROTOCOL IN NON-SECURE THEATER IS TO DEPLOY PICKETS **BEFORE** PROCEEDING TO OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE.

THIS YOU WILL **NOT** DO. YOU WILL, **INSTEAD,** PLOT IMMEDIATE INTERCEPT WITH GEHENNA D-54-C FOR FORGE-DROP.

FOLLOWING THEIR DEPLOYMENT, YOU WILL ASSUME STATION AT GEHENNA-PRIME L-2 AND AWAIT FURTHER ORDERS.

IGNORING NAVAL PROTOCOL IS A COURT-MARTIAL--

THE PART WHERE I SPEAK WITH THE EMPRESS'S VOICE, DID YOU **MISS** THAT, CAPTAIN?

NO, MY LADY, I DID NOT.

YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS. YOU ARE DISMISSED.

YES, MY LADY.

ONE MORE THING, CAPTAIN.

I REQUIRE ***FS3-ALPHA*** TO REPORT TO ME ***IMMEDIATELY.***

I'M ***SORRY***...YOU... YOU WANT HER TO COME ***HERE?***

CORRECT.

YOU WANT A FORGED UP ***HERE?***

IMMEDIATELY.

AND CAPTAIN? HOW ***GOOD*** I ***MADE*** YOU ***FEEL?***

I CAN MAKE YOU FEEL A THOUSAND TIMES ***WORSE*** WITH ***CONSIDERABLY*** LESS EFFORT.

UNDERSTOOD, MY LADY.

FITNESS CENTER

FRAME 117, DECK 40

OFFICERS, GENTLEMEN, I GIVE YOU THE LANCET. AN OFFICER'S WEAPON, THE MOST NOBLE OF ARMS.

WE ARE FORTUNATE TO STUDY THE TECHNIQUES OF A MASTER DUELIST, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER ISKEN.

COMMANDER ISKEN, LEFTENANT BRICKER, STAND READY, SALUTE

--YOUR UNRESOLVED DADDY ISSUES...

...IT *WOULD* EXPLAIN YOUR *PRIMATE* FIXATION--

WOULD YOU JUST SHUT *UP* ALREADY?

AHEM, STAND READY, SALUTE YOUR

--AND YOUR OBSESSION WITH *THAT* PARTICULAR ORGAN.

I MEAN, YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD A THING FOR *BIG*-BARRELED *WEAPONS*...

...DO YOU THINK IT'S *ENVY* OR--

HARPO!

LANGUAGE, JO. THERE ARE OFFICERS PRESENT...

...YOU'LL SEND THEM SCURRYING FOR CLEAN PANTALOONS.

=GASP=

I HOPE YOU DIE.

IS THAT ANY WAY TO TALK TO YOUR BIG SISTER?

BORN THREE-TENTHS OF A SECOND AHEAD OF ME, YOU NEVER LET ME FORGET IT.

NOPE NOPE NOPE NOPE

TROOPERS! SQUAD LEADER, FRONT AND CENTER!

THANKS A *BUNCH*, JO.

SORRY, BOSS.

TROOPER, EXPLAIN YOURSELF.

THE FITNESS ANNEX IS RESERVED FOR *EXCLUSIVE* USE BY OFFICERS AND NCOS DURING FIRST SHIFT.

WHAT ARE YOU...*INFANTRY*... DOING HERE? *WHO* IS YOUR SECTION *LEADER?*

SIR! WE HAVE STANDING PERMISSION TO USE THE ANNEX TO MAINTAIN MISSION READINESS.

ON WHOSE AUTHORITY?

CAPTAIN REYFORT, SIR.

THE *CAPTAIN* OF A WARSHIP IN HER MAJESTY'S MOST *GLORIOUS* FLEET HAS GIVEN PERMISSION FOR FIVE FILTHY GROUND POUNDERS TO USE THE FITNESS ANNEX AT THEIR WHIM?

I AM TO BELIEVE *THIS?*

BY NECESSITY, SIR.

IN MY EXPERIENCE, STANDARD FITNESS EQUIPMENT REACHES FAIL-STATE WHEN EMPLOYED BY A *FORGED* TEAM.

S-SORRY, DID...**FORGED**, YOU SAY?

SCIMITAR-3 TEAM LEADER, REPORTING AS ORDERED, SIR.

CRECHE CODE FS3-ALPHA-READY-ONE, IF YOU WISH TO CHECK OUR AUTHORIZATION, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER.

I UNDERSTAND THAT THE CAPTAIN MAY BE QUITE OCCUPIED WITH SHIP'S BUSINESS, OF COURSE.

IN WHICH CASE, YOU MAY WISH TO CONTACT MY **DIRECT** SUPERIOR...

...MY UNDERSTANDING IS THAT SHE IS MOST OFTEN FOUND **SEATED** ON THE **IMPERIAL THRONE.**

SIR.

CAPTAIN REYFORT TO FS3-ALPHA. REPORT TO FRAME 2, COMMAND DECK, OH-ONE-ONE. ON THE DOUBLE.

IT APPEARS I AM REQUIRED **ELSEWHERE.** IF I MAY BE EXCUSED...?

...UH. YES. **YES**, OF COURSE. MA'AM. ER, TROOPER. **MA'AM.**

PING

WHO IS IT?

FS3-ALPHA, REPORTING AS ORDERED.

ENTER.

COME FORWARD, FORGED.

FAR ENOUGH.

STOP.

FS3-ALPHA, CONCEPTION DATE 13,792, BATCH NUMBER 3,814,908.

THE FOMALHAUT-SIRIUS ***CRECHE,*** THIRD TIER. CREATED ON THE 22ND OF NINEMONTH, 13,793.

PRE-SELECTION 14TH TWOMONTH, 13,794.

EARNED YOUR ***NAME*** ON 30 SIXMONTH, 13,800.

VICTORY.

HAPPY "BIRTHDAY," BY THE WAY.

YOU DON'T *REMEMBER* ME, DO YOU?

...

OH, FOR THE ETERNAL'S *SAKE.*

AT EASE, FORGED. YOU MAY SPEAK *FREELY.*

NO, MY LADY. I'VE NEVER BEEN IN THE PRESENCE OF A *CASSANDRA* BEFORE.

FORGED AREN'T ALLOWED TO ASSOCIATE WITH... CITIZENS ABOVE A CERTAIN *STATION.*

OH, YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE IT SOUND *PRETTY.*

THEY *LOVE* TO LOOK AT YOU, BUT THEY DON'T WANT YOU IN THEIR *HOMES* FOR FEAR OF THE MESS YOU'LL *LEAVE* ON THE *MARBLE.*

GET *COMFORTABLE.*

I'LL STAND, IF THAT'S ALL RIGHT.

YOU *REALLY* DON'T REMEMBER ME?

I'M SORRY, I DON'T.

WE'RE FROM THE *SAME* BATCH, VIC.

WE'RE *CRECHE-MATES.*

SO YOU CAN WISH **ME** A HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TOO, IF YOU LIKE.

...HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

THAT WHY I WAS ORDERED HERE? FAMILY REUNION?

SEEMS **UNLIKELY,** DOESN'T IT?

SEEMS **BULLSHIT,** YEAH.

EVERYONE KNOWS THE ETERNAL KEEPS HER CASSANDRAS **CLOSE.**

IN FACT, **SOME** SAY SHE KEEPS YOU UNDER **LOCK AND KEY.**

YET YOU'RE **ABOARD** A **WARSHIP** THOUSANDS OF LIGHT YEARS FROM **THE THRONE.**

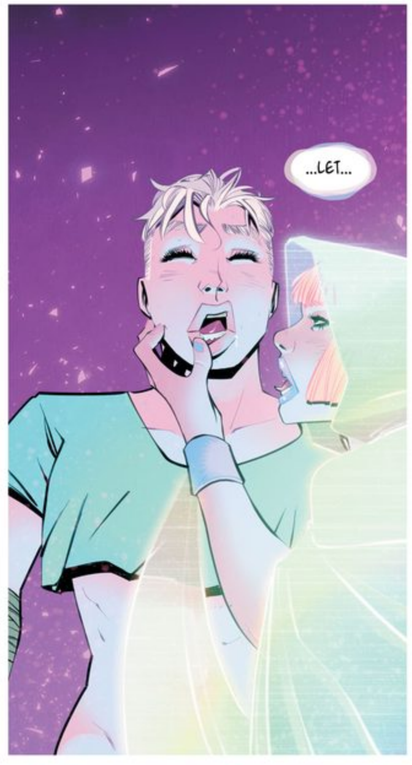
AND YOU WANT TO TALK TO **ME.**

I WANT MUCH MORE THAN **TALK,** VICTORY.

NO.
I HAVE TO BE CERTAIN, SISTER.

WE'RE NOT SISTERS.
BY THE ETERNAL, I AM DELIGHTED TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT.

LET ME IN, VIC...


...LET...

...ME...

...IN.

GASP

FS3-ALPHA TO FS3-BRAVO.

PING

JO, GET THE TEAM TO THE HANGAR BAY, ON THE DOUBLE. START ***PRE-LAUNCH*** ON THE ARMOR.

I'VE GOT A ***BAD*** FEELING.

I'M ON MY WAY DOWN.

WHEN YOU GET A BAD FEELING, I WANT TO DOUBLE UP ON **AMMO**, BOSS.

REYFORT GIVING YOU TROUBLE?

THERE'S A CASSANDRA ABOARD, JO.

SHE SENT FOR **ME.**

HOLY FUSION-POWERED **SHIT.**

THAT'S...A TURBOCHARGED IRREGULARITY. WHAT'D SHE **SAY?**

I DON'T **REMEMBER.** AND I **DON'T** LIKE IT.

CASSES DON'T **LEAVE** COURT.

YOU DON'T REMEMBER? I'VE HEARD **BAD** STUFF ABOUT HOW THOSE **MINDWITCHES** CAN DILDO UP YOUR **BRAINS** BUT GOOD.

THAT SO?

THEN YOU MUST'VE ENCOUNTERED A THOUSAND OF THEM, GIVEN THE SORRY STATE OF **YOUR** BRAINS.

ROGER THAT, YOU COMPLETE BITCH, **SIR.**

--NO, NO! DAMMIT, THE ADRENAL BOOSTERS ARE IN INJECTOR FEED FOUR. FOUR, LIKE HOW MANY DICKS YOUR MOM LIKES IN HER MOUTH--

...ROGER.

--SQUARE THAT CONDUIT AWAY, WRENCH MONKEY. NO USE CARRYING A FAST-FABRICATION UNIT ON MY BACK IF IT DISCONNECTS FROM THE SUPPLY RESERVOIR--

AYE, AYE, I'M ON IT --

RELAY: HEAT VENTING ALIGNMENT IS .00624 PERCENT OFF SPEC. ADJUST.

...SHE CAN SEE THAT? WITHOUT AN ALIGNMENT SCANNER?

RELAY: I AM SAD YOU CAN'T.

SPEAKING OF COMPLETE BITCHES. HOW LONG BEFORE THE TECH TEAM BEGINS SOBBING?

ANY MINUTE NOW.

FORGED! FALL IN AND SOUND OFF!

FS3-EPSILON, CORPSMAN AND FIELD SURGEON! CALLSIGN: PUSHER! READY!

FS3-DELTA, COMBAT ENGINEER! CALLSIGN: HAP! SQUARED AWAY, SIR!

RELAY: FS3-GAMMA, SCOUT-SNIPER AND FIELD RECONNAISSANCE. CALLSIGN: HARPO. WE STAND READY.

GOOD.

WE'RE ON DECK FOR MISSION LAUNCH AT 1440. ABOUT THREE HOURS FROM NOW.

WE'RE GOING TO BE READY TO JUMP ON TARGET IN NINETY MINUTES.

I DON'T SEE SOME TECHS REGRETTING THEIR LIFE CHOICES, I'LL BE DISAPPOINTED, TEAM.

"T-SPACE RE-ENTRY IN FOUR...THREE...TWO...ONE...

"...AND DECEL COMPLETE..."

...STANDING BY TO DEPLOY PICKETS ON YOUR ORDER, CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN?

STANDING BY TO DEPLOY PICKETS ON YOUR ORDER.

I HEARD YOU, KAILA.

THE NERVE. THIS IS *MY* SHIP.

UHM... SIR?

NOT NOW.

TO *HELL* WITH HER.

PLOT SECURITY COURSE LAMBDA-FOUR AND EXECUTE ON MY...

...COMMAND....

PLOT INTERCEPT TO TARGET AND INITIATE FOR FORGE-DROP.

THEN PREPARE TO *STAND OFF* AT L-2.

BELAY THAT.

...AYE AYE, SIR.

HOW THEY DOING?

THEY'RE SPOOKED.

THEY'RE FINE. THEY'RE ALWAYS FINE.

THEY'RE THE **BEST.** BUT THERE'S A STINK OF WEIRD COMING OFF THIS OP AND THEY CAN **SMELL** IT.

SO CAN I.

AND SSSSSSSSO DDDDDDDDO

YYYYYYYYYYY

HELLO, VICTORY.

IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO REMEMBER-- FOR A MOMENT-- WHAT I TOLD YOU.

LEAD US TO **GLORY.**

YYYOU.

...BOSS? YOU ALL RIGHT?

NO TIME

THERE'S NO TIME.

BOLT IN!

ON THE DOUBLE!

SCIMITAR TO *TRIUMPH* LAUNCH CONTROL--

--I AM CALLING A REDBALL, I REPEAT, REDBALL!

WHAT THE HELL IS SHE DOING?

VICTORY FOR ETERNITY.

EMERGENCY LAUNCH! ACKNOWLEDGE!

COUNTERMAND THAT!

KAILA, LOCK OFF LAUNCH CONTROL AND--

VICTORY FOREVER.

E.V.I.L.: OVERRIDE ON MY AUTHORIZATION. UPDATE MISSION SYNC AND GET US READY FOR EVA.

CONFIRMED. LAUNCH TRIGGER CONTROL IS NOW YOURS.

SCIMITAR TO LAUNCHCON: RESPOND.

NO RESPONSE DETECTED.

ONE, THIS IS TWO. WHAT THE *DONKEYHUMPING FUCK* IS GOING ON?

IF WE JUMP NOW, WE'LL BE OFF TARGET.

WE'RE *LEAVING* RIGHT FUCKING *NOW.*

SLAVING EVERYONE'S ONBOARDS TO MINE; I'LL REACQUIRE THE TARGET WHEN WE GET OUTSIDE.

SYNCHRONIZATION COMPLETE. LAUNCH WHEN READY.

CLEAR THE CHANNEL, TWO...

...WE'RE WORKING NOW.

ONE TO SCIMITAR-ALL, E.V.I.L. SHOWS US POINT-TWO-SIX SPINWARD OFF THE ORIGINAL TRACK. COMPENSATING MANUALLY.

IT'S GONNA GET BUMPY.

ALERT. MOTHERSHIP IS OFF COURSE AND OFF PROTOCOL.

THE FUCK ARE THEY DOING?

INSUFFICIENT DATA TO DETERMINE WHAT THE FUCK THEY ARE DOING.

NEW FIRING SOLUTION CALCULATED. SHALL I SYNC AND ENGAGE?

DO IT.

GOING BALLISTIC... NOW.

DISENGAGING AND EJECTING THRUSTER PODS NOW.

E.V.I.L. CONFIRMS OUR ADJUSTED FIRING SOLUTION WILL PUT US A FEW KLICKS OFF TARGET.

FREEFALL. E.V.I.L.: POLL TEAM BIODATA AND REPORT STATUS.

FS3-EPSILON,
CALLSIGN: PUSHER.
STRESS LEVELS MITIGATED BY APPLIED RELAXANT WARDRUGS.
STATUS: NORMAL.

OHH, I AM SO GOOOOOOOOOD, VIC.

FS3-GAMMA,
CALLSIGN: HARPO.
IN REM SLEEP, STRESS LEVELS 8% BELOW BASELINE.
STATUS: NORMAL.

FS3-DELTA,
CALLSIGN: HAP.
PULSE AND RESPIRATION ON BASELINE.
STATUS: NORMAL.

HM. THRUSTER DETACHMENT SEEMED A LITTLE CHOPPY. MAYBE UPGRADE SHOCK ABSORPTION SYSTEMS IN LUMBAR PLATING?

FS3-BRAVO,
CALLSIGN: CRAZYJO.
BODY TEMPERATURE, PULSE, AND RESPIRATION ELEVATED.
AROUSAL RESPONSE DETECTED.
STATUS: NORMAL.

NNNNF

FS3-ALPHA,
CALLSIGN: VIC.
STATUS: NORMAL.

ALERT.
ATMOSPHERIC ENTRY.

POSITION OFF TRACK BY POINT-TWO-FOUR, INCREASING TO POINT-TWO-FOUR-TWO.

DISTANCE TO SURFACE: TWO KILOMETERS.

ONE.

POINT-FIVE. BRAKING SEQUENCE...

...ENGAGED. POINT-TWO-FIVE.

IMPACT.

FORM ON ME.

E.V.I.L.: CONTACT *TRIUMPH* AND FIND OUT WHAT THE FUCK THEY'RE DOING.

NEGATIVE RESPONSE. CARRIER WAVE ACTIVE, NO RETURN PING.

...UH-OH.

ALPHA, SCOPE UP ABOUT 90 DEGREES, FULL MAGNIFICATION.

WE'RE BONED.

AND NOT IN THE *FUN* WAY.

UPDATE:
ADDITIONAL DATA AVAILABLE, RE: QUERY "WHAT THE FUCK THEY ARE DOING."

ANSWER: CRASHING.

MAG :250x

ADDITIONAL EXTRAPOLATION BASED ON CURRENT DESCENT TRAJECTORY:

ON *US.*

HAP. PREP THE KINETIC SHIELDS AND FLUIDIC SYSTEMS.

DO IT NOW.

THE KINETICS ARE GOOD FOR A MINUTE OR TWO AGAINST SMALL ARMS FIRE, BOSS. NOT SURE WHAT USE THEY'LL--

YOU GOT A BETTER IDEA, NOW'S THE TIME.

...SYSTEMS PREPPED. NOW WHAT?

NOW...

RUN LIKE FUCK.

We are born to serve
Her Exalted Majesty.
We are bred to obey
Her Divine Radiance.
We will die–singing and with joy
in our hearts–for **The Eternal Empress.**

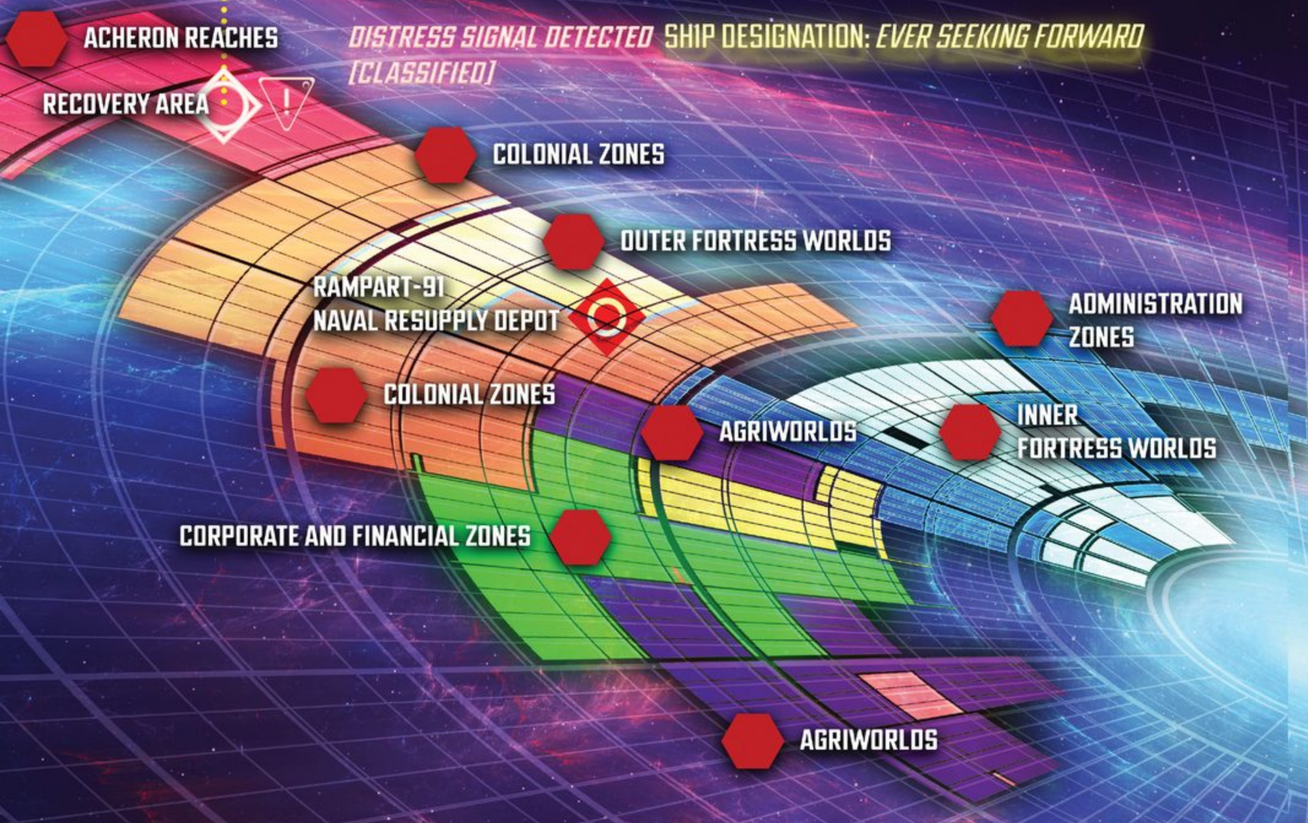
We do not falter.
We do not fail.
We do not retreat.

Should our swords and spears shatter
against **Her** enemies' shields,
It does not matter,
for we are more than our weapons.

We are **Her** weapons.

We are The Forged.

The Forged Creed



PLANET: GEHENNA D-54-C
OPERATIONAL THEATER 51-D-11

ENVIRONMENT: INHOSPITABLE
FORMER AL-ASHANTI ASSET
ABANDONED AFTER TERRAFORMING ACCIDENT

ALERT! ORBIT UNSTABLE!

SURVEY DATA: INCOMPLETE (FILE CORRUPTION DETECTED)
ATMOSPHERE: METHANE / AMMONIA
TEMPERATURE: UNKNOWN
GRAVITY: UNKNOWN
NO NATIVE FAUNA/FLORA DETECTED

HER ETERNAL MAJESTY'S EMPIRE
[PARTIAL VIEW: COUNTER-SPINWARD SLICE]

MANY ARE HER WORLDS

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND GAZETTEER

by Professor Hirum Ozgupto, Imperial University of Prospero Ceti II

OVER THE COUNTLESS CENTURIES OF Her Eternal Rule, the Empress has created—through grace, determination, and the hand of destiny—an unrivaled paradise for Her subjects. Once-uninhabitable worlds have been terraformed into agricultural oases, glittering jewels in the blackness of space; industrial efficiency and the grit and tenacity of the Empire's workers wrest untold natural treasures to improve the lives of all; technological advancement has gifted Her court with such wonders that once would have been considered nothing less than magical.

Such progress and plenty have led to a complex, evolving intergalactic geography that can, to the layperson, seem utterly bewildering. The advent of intergalactic travel via "T-Space" capability—the faster-than-light interdimensional engines that carry Her Benevolent Rule to the farthest corners of the stars—has, perhaps more than anything else, been the fuel which powers Imperial expansion.

Our vast Fleet transports military and law-enforcement assets to the distant frontier, and has ended wrong-headed and foolhardy notions of dissent, relegating such nonsense to the dustbin of History.

Here then are some regions of Her Mighty Empire. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and while general characteristics are listed for each locale, the organizational nature of the Empire means that there is considerable overlap—banks and financial institutions can be found in agricultural zones, for example.

THRONE SECTORS

Our Beloved Empress maintains palaces throughout her Empire—from the Home Systems to the Far Reaches. Typically Throne Sectors are found in the center of clusters of Fortress Worlds and military and Royal Protection Assets are plentiful.

Throneworlds are ordered and luxurious, centers of art, culture, architecture, and music, as befits Her Highness. The pinnacle of all Throneworlds is found in Sector Zero. Called Homeworld, it is the site of the Forever Palace (which occupies the planet's main continent and is the central hub of all Royal activity).

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- Homeworld
- Orfin Prime
- Geidi Luxe
- Nova Palace (Ariadne-II)

FORTRESS WORLDS

Clustered around important regions—from Throne Sectors to critical industrial and agricultural sites—Fortress Worlds form the infrastructure of the Imperial military. Planet-spanning shipyards and starports allow for the rapid deployment of Naval assets, and infantry training, testing, and staging areas mean there is never a shortage of capable and reliable troopers.

Some Fortress Worlds—notably those closest to the Home Systems (the Inner Fortress Worlds)—have grown to encompass entire star systems; others are more remote and tend to be equipped for more basic needs (the Outer Fortress Worlds); shiptender ports, refueling depots, and so forth form the bulk of these installations.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- Praetor Alpha Shipyards
- Adamantus VII
- Ballistae
- Military Orbital Facility L51-D ("The Castra.")

CORPORATE AND FINANCIAL ZONES

Independent business and industry are vital to the Empire, and Her Majesty encourages free enterprise, trade, exploration, and economic development.

Under Her wise rule, banking conglomerates have

grown so vast and complex that they occupy hundreds of star systems. Such zones operate under special legal codes and taxation waivers in order to facilitate rapid responses to changing economic conditions.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- Obelisk (HQ of Al-Ashanti Corp)
- Cairna IX (HQ of The Prush Consortium)
- Tortupha III (HQ of BrillingiMax)

LEISUREWORLDS

Leisureworlds can be found throughout the Empire, save the Reaches; some are corporate-owned resort locations (from orbital casinos to resort planets that cater to every social stratum) while others are privately owned and are custom-designed for the ultra-wealthy and powerful.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- Urkworld (a family resort system run by Urkarts Creative)
- Obsidian Caverns (a natural park world)
- Fortune's Favor (casino planet)

AGRIWORLDS

As industry, finance, and military expansion have continued, so has the need to feed the Empire's citizenry. Terraforming technology perfected over centuries has created robust and varied sources of food. Corporate oversight has allowed for great efficiency, and thousands of sectors have been transformed into entire Farm Systems, composed of hundreds of agriworlds. Hunger in the Empire is a thing of the ancient past.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- AgriCombine Corporation Interplanetary Growers' Market (trade and shipping hub)

COLONIAL ZONES

Outward growth is a sign of the health of the Empire. Her Royal Highness has therefore created incentive programs to encourage outward colonial expansion into regions that have been underutilized.

The Imperial Civilian Colony Authority pays stipends to families willing to undertake the adventure of taming new worlds, and works closely with the Royal Scout Armada, the Fleet, and civilian cartographic firms to locate new sites at the frontiers of Imperial space. A challenging life to be certain, but highly rewarding.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- Farbound Station (border region spaceport for outbound flights)

THE REACHES/THE FAR FRONTIERS

At the edge of the Empire lie areas that have only been mapped or given cursory surveys; indeed, there are systems that have yet to be discovered!

Colonial agencies are often tasked with the scouting and exploration of these fringe regions with an eye toward corporate development. (Huge bonuses are paid to independent prospectors, freelance interstellar cartographers, and so forth, for the discovery of worlds ripe for corporate, industrial, or military exploitation.) Here can be found the hardiest of souls—determined to stake their claim and find their fortune for the glory of Her Empire.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS:

- None.

PROFESSOR HIRUM OZGUPTO holds the Exo-geography and Galactic Cartography Chair of the Vantii Royal College, Imperial University of Prospero Ceti II

An Overview of the Tactical and Strategic Applications as Examined by Analysis of the Historical Development of the Single-Pilot Creche-Generated Advanced Weapons Platform, also known as The Forged.

Excerpt from a lecture by **ADJUTANT GENERAL WINSTON BARTHELEMIEU OBART**, CGHRMWC, OEE, KCEE.
*Delivered 38 Firstmonth, 12,782 at **Spiralarch Common**, at Her Eternal Majesty's War College.*

FELLOW OFFICERS, DISTINGUISHED VISITORS, cadets, and of course, honored guests of Spiralarch. I may stumble a bit here, indeed, even digress. Admiral Kantee remains as generous a host as ever, and I fear some of us put a dent in his cellars this evening.

Those of you who have known me for more than a few days, indeed, any of you who have served with me, will be familiar with the core of what I have to say. I'm an old man beating an old drum, but in a career bound by duty, I feel duty-bound to keep beating it. Yes, I know, here we go again.

The need for a mobile mechanized armored platform capable of rapid deployment and insertion into theatre is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a new one. Even today, main units of the Imperial military rely upon mechanized armor—the Qualoyn Fifty-Third being perhaps the most famous of these, not to mention the Empress's Shrapnel Eaters and the Buckaneers of the Eight-Seven-Seven. To many, then, the evolution of such a mobile platform into a multi-function, single-user design seems self-evident.

Perhaps it was. It was easy enough to conceive.

It was near-impossible to make manifest.

To begin with, there were the legions of core engineering and design issues to be overcome. There's a reason mobile armor moved on treads before lifttech adaptation and why the wheel is, by all accounts, considered the first machine. Moving on two goddamn legs isn't stable. Fundamentally, just isn't.

But what it is, it's mobile.

So balance becomes an immediate issue, the center of gravity on a system that must be able to operate as effectively in zero-g as in 8-g, even 10-g.

It's got to be armored, too, obviously. It needs to be able to withstand not just conventional arms, but non-conventional, as well. It must be able to handle radical environments, from vacuum to inferno and everything in between with no reduction in mission capability. It's got to be able to get shot.

And it damn well better be able to shoot back. In fact, it had damn well better be able to shoot back with such devastating ferocity and power that it can secure the mission objective without question.

To do that, then, it must be able to operate without need for constant upkeep and resupply, a problem which—to this day—conventional armor still struggles with navigating.

Oh, and it must be powered.

This is just a small overview of what went into the design phase, and if you grant any of what I've just said consideration, you will see that some of these appear to be, if not mutually exclusive, certainly difficult to coordinate.

So, solution: multiple platforms designed for multiple core functions, but capable of supplementing one another in the aggregate to achieve mission success. Or, to put it another way, specialize the armors—heavy weapons platform versus infiltration platform versus support and so on.

This leads to the inevitable re-evaluation of the core purpose of the platform and mission-creep. We are no longer describing a unit that supplements or magnifies battlefield force, but instead is a multifunction, fully developed force-magnifier in its own right. The platforms, while specialized to specific tasks and capable of supplementing one another in the aggregate, have now evolved to be, effectively, their own army. Where a brigade was once required to achieve mission success, we have now conceived of a platform that will attain that success on its own, or, at least, in concert with a handful of other similar platforms.

In turn, we are again confronted by further design complications, which lead to additional refinements, and so the process continues.

Now these are all, as I have described, engineering problems rooted in the design phase. But as the platforms evolve and their roles specialize, we arrive at the core issue.

Who the hell is gonna pilot these things?

Design now demands that crew for the platform be limited. AI options are considered—no pilot, but let the computer handle it—but that is ultimately discounted because, as each and every one of us knows, an AI capable of adapting to battlefield conditions is an AI that is very quickly going to get its own ideas on how to do things. Nobody in this room—for that matter nobody in the Empire—has forgotten what started on Charlotte's Hope in 8,260...or on Jofe-III in 7,989, or on Beckervass in 10,434, the list goes on and on.

AI is out. AI assistance is in, of course, almost definitionally, but limiters are presumed. No, there's going to need to be a sentient, trained pilot at the yoke. A single one, capable of not solely piloting their platform, but also trained in an entirely new school of small unit tactics, developed to interface with the other platforms in their squad.

Well, you think, how's that a problem? We've got fleets of fighters that, when not given to computer-control, are crewed by single individuals. Sure, there's thousands of hours of training involved in getting those individuals to a place we'll slap them into the cockpit of one of those things, but it's doable. Send them to flight school! Problem solved!

Yes.

And no.

Because it turns out your average pilot is going to get their body turned to pudding and their mind turned to sludge when they're plugged into the platform. This is not hypothetical. First-gen testing resulted in over twelve hundred volunteers being retired from service. These are lives given for the Empire's glory, though their ends were anything but glorious.

So who the hell is going to pilot these things when everyone who can ends up fit to be recycled through a sieve?

The solution is found by remaining true to the same design philosophy that governed the creation of the very platforms themselves. If we're purpose-building the platform, why aren't we purpose-building the pilot?

And this is why, as many of my honored colleagues have heard me say many times before, it is insulting, dangerous, and foolish to mistake the armor and the pilot, to refer to the former as The Forged and to ignore the latter. That's getting it wrong. That's getting it backwards.

It is the pilots who are The Forged. The armor is just what they happen to be wearing when they're dropped into whatever gods-forsaken theatre we deploy them to. The armor—the platform—is precisely that. It is nothing without the pilot. It is nothing without The Forged within.

Why insulting? Why dangerous? Why foolish? This isn't hyperbole.

Because each and every one of The Forged has been selected from creche batches not of thousands or hundreds of thousands but of millions for their role. Each and every one of The Forged has been selected from genuinely inconceivable numbers of her sisters for her role. On the very genetic level, as overseen by the Eternal Empress herself, these women have been bred and selected to their purpose, this single purpose. They begin their training not at birth, but arguably at conception. They are, quite literally, made for this.

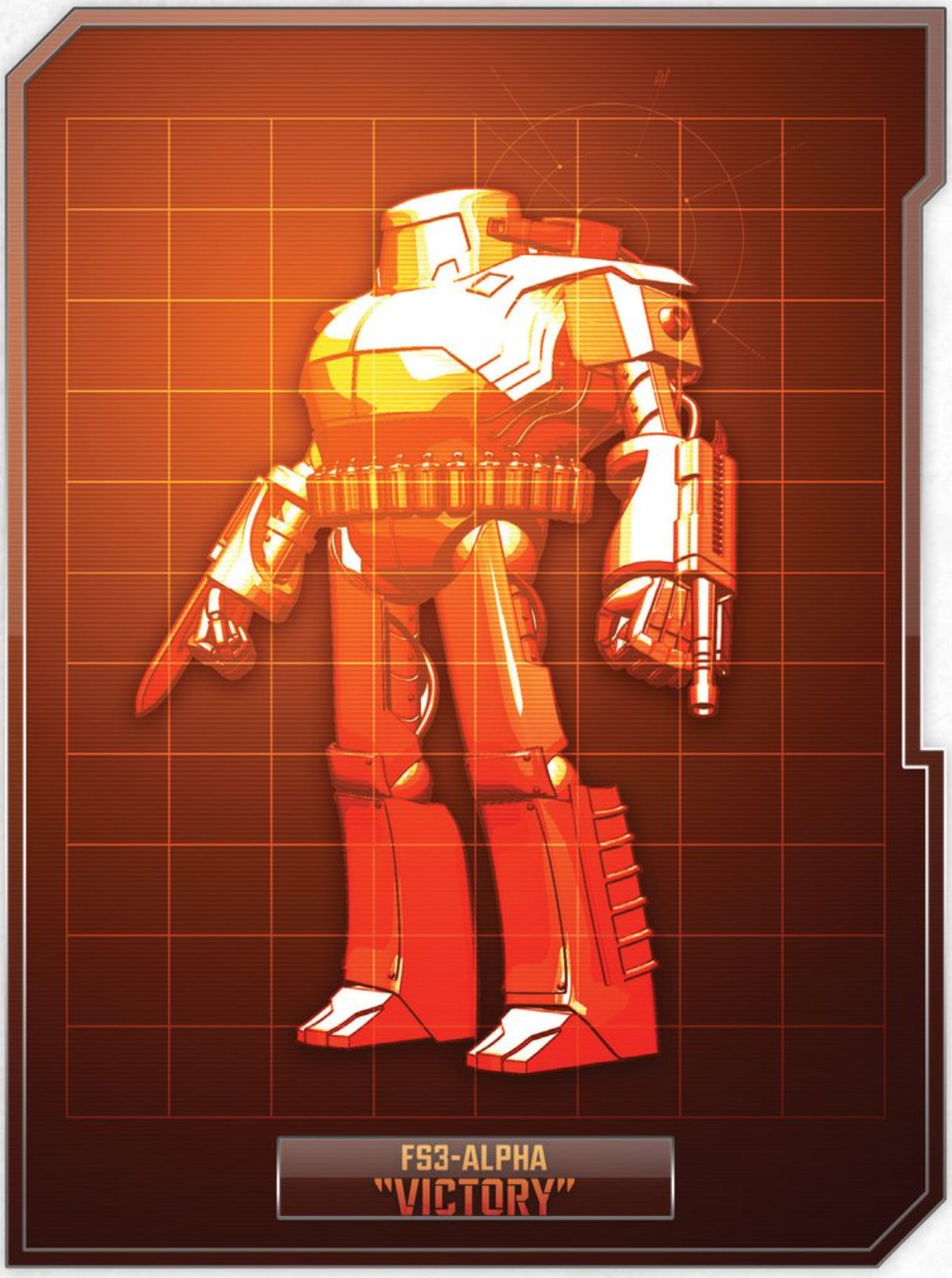
And they are made with—at least in part—the very genetic material of our Glorious Eternal Herself.

Never, ever forget that.

At this point, I'd like to turn our attention to the engagement at Sonak in 13,810. Some of you may have heard about the uprising there, and how the regimental command fell within the first half hour of the revolt, at which point the global defense network fell into enemy hands. This was the incident that led to the downing of the Starfortress ***With Unwavering Gaze and Piercing Eye***. The incident is relevant because Sonak was secured and the revolt put down through the actions of a single—I repeat, a single—unit of The Forged, operating on her own and outside of traditional command.

Can we put up the first map, please? Beginning at 03:47 Sonak-Zone 1 local, you can see the defense grid has been activated and ***With Unwavering Gaze and Piercing Eye*** is already off-station and without power....

WARRIOR PROFILE



Forged/Scimitar-3 ALPHA [FS3-A]

SERIAL NUMBER: 3874908-17-7-K
DESIGNATION: Team Leader
CRECHE: Fomalhaut-Sirius
WARNAME: Victory

- MULTIPLE WEAPONS MASTERY CERTIFICATIONS: 13,799–13,804
- MULTIPLE COMMAND, SMALL UNIT, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ADVANCED TACTICAL CERTIFICATIONS, 13,799–13,809
- CERTIFIED EXPERT: WARSUIT OPERATION

SELECT LIST OF CITATIONS/AWARDS:

- Agamemnon Leadership Medal
- Helix Expedition Medal
- Empress's Cross
- Imperial Blade of Honor Medal
- Fortress of Sonak Defense Medallion
- Liberation of Lorsika-10 Medal
- Sword of War Service Cross
- Imperial Legion of Merit Award

E. V. I. L. SPEAKS

__SESSION BEGINS__

OVERVIEW:

The **Evolved Virtual Intelligence and Logistics** platform exists to engage in natural, human-like interaction with its user, and is capable of executing complex commands and engaging in a question-and-answer format most familiar through citizens of the Empire. The E.V.I.L. database is comprehensive and encompasses all the known inhabited worlds within the **Eternal Empire**, with historical records dating back to the first millennium of the Empire's founding.

Information about the **Eternal Empress**, **Her** worlds, **Her** citizens, and other aspects of the entirety of the known galaxy are available for query. Some information may be marked **CLASSIFIED** and will require the appropriate security clearance to access. Such clearance is evaluated as determined by the criteria established by the **Imperial Office of Information** [*Official Secrets and Security Act of 5,653*, Subsection HH, Paragraph 137, 282v; amended 5,654; amended 5,655; amended 5,700; for list of further amendments, please specify date-range of results].

Citizens are encouraged to interact with E.V.I.L. with requests, comments, and inquiries via T-Space enabled Permaweb at the address:

__ForgedAskEvil@gmail.com__

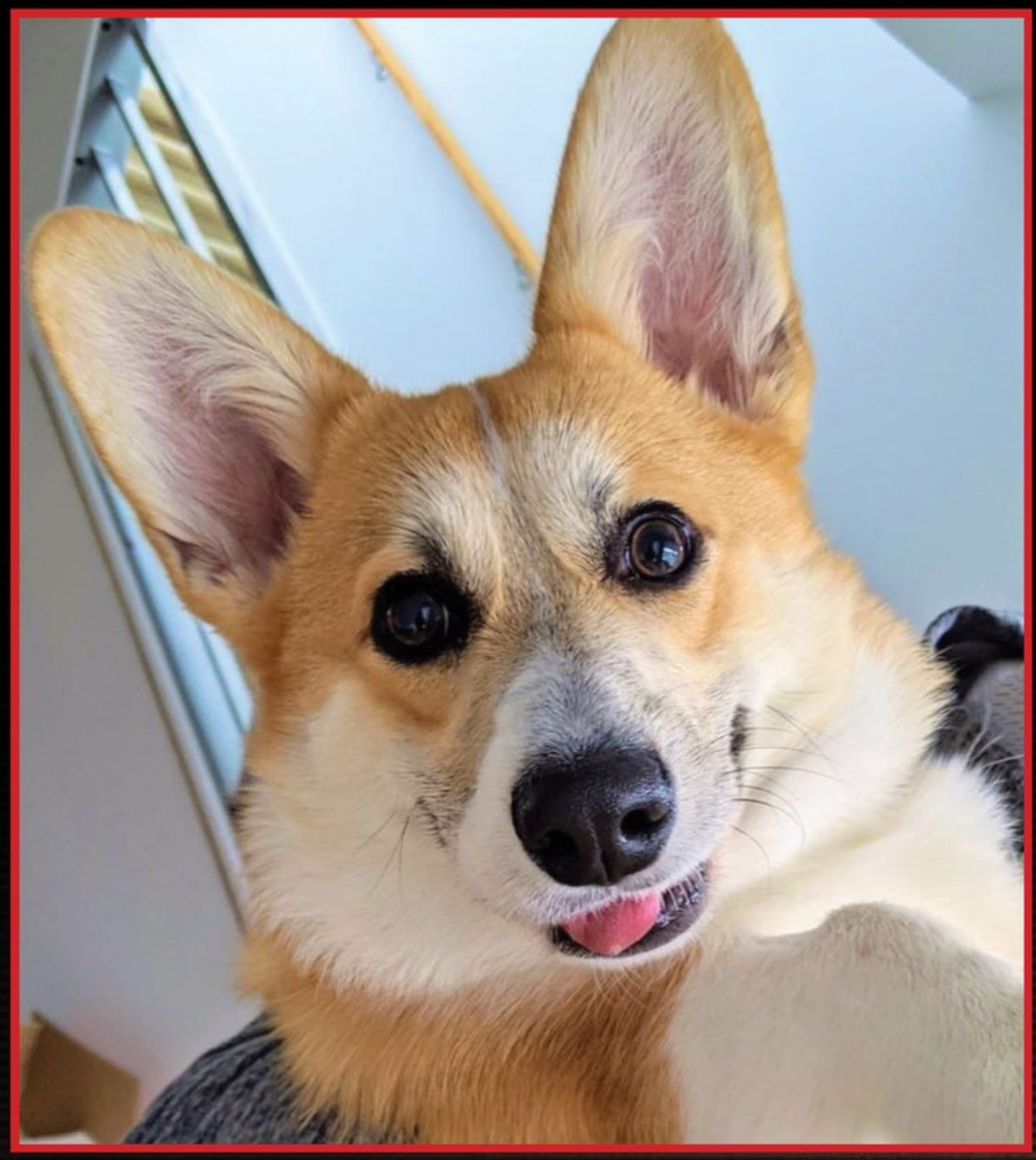
Virtual community access is available via permaweb under › HEADING › LAZARUS_DISCORD_CHANNEL › THE_FORGED and may be accessed at the following address: https://discord.gg/lazarus-comic

Embed scansequence to same follows:

All interactions are subject to security backtrace, analysis, and evaluation, and will be processed on a case-by-case basis.

SYSTEM ACTIVE. HOW MAY I ASSIST YOUR QUERY?

E.V.I.L. likes dogs.



This dog is named EIN.

E.V.I.L. approves of Ein because he is a capable and distinguished neighborhood ambassador who requires payment in simple pets and a delicacy known simply as "giblets."

This dog is named MARLOWE.

E.V.I.L. approves of Marlowe because her manner is clearly composed and refined, and she speaks in perfectly accented French.

If you have a canine you would like to submit for E.V.I.L. evaluation, please mark your permaweb submission to the above address with "E.V.I.L. likes dogs." Identify the canine in question by name and gender and include information about him or her that would convince E.V.I.L. why E.V.I.L. will like him or her as well.

--SESSION ENDS--

That which must happen, must happen.

Koan 2,210

Scrolls of the Cassandras

UNUSED COVER DESIGN FOR THE FORGED #1

ART: MIKE HENDERSON · COLORS: NOLAN WOODARD

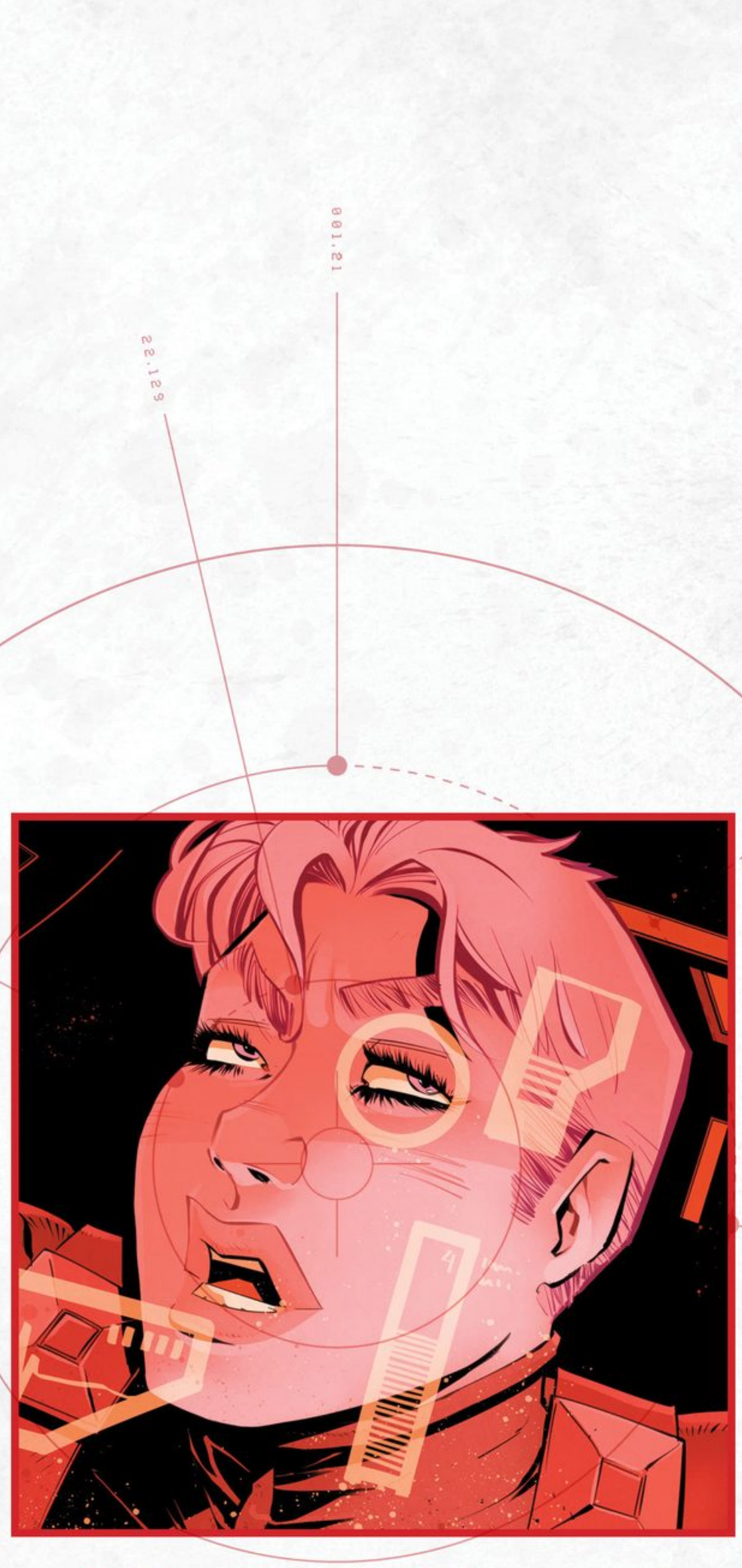
NEXT ISSUE:

The Forged are trapped on the hellscape of Gehenna where the locals are very hungry. CrazyJo loses an arm.

Again.

APRIL 19, 2023

image®



"It's gonna get bumpy."

Adventure / SciFi / Space Opera

RATED **M** / MATURE

ZONE